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## Latvian veterans receive Combat Infantryman Badge at Saber Strike 2011

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ADAZI TRAINING AREA, Latvia — Fear is nearly universal in combat, and overcoming that fear to accomplish great things for nation, allies, and comrades in arms can be the ultimate test of combat soldiers, including several Latvian army soldiers, who, fighting alongside U.S. and Afghan soldiers, earned a variety of U.S. Army awards including Army Commendation Medals with Valor Devices, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

“It’s not fear during the attack; mostly you focus on your job, what you can and have to do. You have to save yourself and save the guy next to you,” said Capt. Juris Višņakovs, an operations officer for 2nd Battalion, Latvian Infantry Brigade. “Fear comes later when you are coming back to base, get some relaxation... the fear comes to me and I’m shaking and I’m scared about what can happen, did happen, and didn’t happen.”

Višņakovs, and several other Latvian veterans of the International Security Assistance Force were able to share their experiences at a ceremony hosted by the 16th

Sustainment Brigade's Saber Strike 2011 command post. Although each soldier received multiple awards, the CIB was clearly the highlight for the Latvian soldiers.

"I appreciate it and I'm really happy because this infantry badge means a lot," said Capt. Agris Liepiņš, an operations officer for the Latvian Infantry Brigade.

"I don't remember all the names [of the awards], but the most important is the CIB," said Višņakovs.

While honored to receive the awards, both captains remembered the hardships they endured during their deployment to Afghanistan from July 2009 to April 2010 and the relationships they built with other soldiers during their deployment.

The soldiers earned the awards for various acts of service during a deployment in Afghanistan marked by frequent attacks, ambushes, and significant actions on the part of the Latvian, U.S. and Afghan soldiers, according to award citations.

"We got attacked a lot, got ambushed several times together with U.S. troops and hardly survived," recalled Višņakovs. "I think everybody cares about everyone. Mostly I was worried about my subordinates... I worried about my counterparts, Afghan and U.S."

Liepiņš also cited the relationships with Afghan and U.S. counterparts as critical to everyone's survival. The strong relationships between Afghan, U.S. and Latvian forces ensured that all three forces worked well together when they endured hard times and faced challenging circumstances, according to Liepiņš.

The presentation of the CIB to Latvian soldiers Oct. 19 during Saber Strike 2011 marked the first time in Latvian history that any Latvian soldier received the U.S. Army CIB.



More than 30 Latvian soldiers received U.S. medals Oct. 19, which included two Army Commendation Medals with the Valor device and 24 Combat Infantryman Badges., U.S. Ambassador to Latvia, H.E. Judith G. Garber and Latvia's Chief of Defense, Maj. Gen. Raimonds Graube were on hand to recognize the bravery and valor of Latvia's Operational Mentor and Liaison Team 2 during their nine-month deployment to Afghanistan. During their deployment, the entire team endured constant enemy fire while on their outpost and during patrol missions. (Photo by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edward Perrin, 16<sup>th</sup> Sust.Bde.)